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DOE FOR GEORGE PERSON

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TAGS: [MARR](#) [MASS](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECOWAS](#) [XY](#) [NI](#)
SUBJECT: ECOWAS STANDBY FORCE: ITS PRESENT STATUS

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Classified By: Political Counselor Walter Pflaumer for reasons 1.4. (b & d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: The ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF) is frequently mentioned by those in the African security community as the best developed of the African rapid-reaction brigades called for by the African Union (AU) in July 2004. Indeed, ECOWAS has come a long way from the days of the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) interventions, with pledged units from all member states identified, training exercises taking place, some staff slots filled, and some conflict prevention/resolution doctrine worked out. It has also begun to put in place both the peace support operations (PSO) doctrine and the organizational infrastructure necessary to move beyond a mere military response and into the area of a civilian peacebuilding capability. However, many of these advances are on paper only, or are mitigated by other factors. Serious challenges and shortcomings remain to be overcome if ECOWAS is to intervene effectively in the next West African crisis and avoid the mistakes of the past. This cable provides a short analysis of the basic structure of the ESF and an analysis of ECOWAS' achievements and shortfalls in the arena of conflict prevention and response. END SUMMARY.

CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND THE ESF

¶2. (U) The ECOWAS Standby Force is being created to address persistent subregional strife and the shortcomings of previous efforts under its previous incarnation called ECOMOG. It was developed in conjunction with the AU's doctrine on creating an indigenous African peacekeeping/enforcing capability. The original configuration was 6500 soldiers from pre-selected units of member states -- a 1500-man rapid reaction Task Force (TF) prepared to deploy within 30 days (ECOWAS leadership has since increased the TF size to 2773 soldiers), and a Main Brigade (MB) of around 5000 soldiers. The MB is to be deployable within 90 days. Both the TF and the MB are to be self-sustainable for 90 day deployments, with one of the following actions subsequently to occur: 1) TF elements will

return to their home states; 2) the TF will remain in place as part of the deploying MB contingent; 3) the TF will become an element of an AU or UN mission; or 4) the TF will hand over operations to a UN or AU force. ECOWAS is relying on a series of donor-financed and -led training exercises to take place in various member states, culminating in a large-scale Force Training Exercise sometime in 2009 for the TF to reach mission-capable status by 2010. Strategic planning will be done by the Mission Planning and Management Cell, and operational planning is led by current ECOWAS ESF Chief of Staff Brigadier General Hassan Lai, a Nigerian. Furthermore, future military action is to be taken concurrently with civilian peacebuilding activities to ensure a holistic, long-term approach to conflict management, societal rebuilding, and the protection of human rights.

13. (U) ECOWAS has also made progress on other key aspects of creating effective conflict prevention and response mechanisms. These include ECOWARN, a directorate with offices throughout West Africa, whose specific tasks are to monitor destabilizing threats of all kinds, analyze them, and disseminate information about these threats to member states; the Emergency Response Team, composed of civilians who are sent out to perform such tasks as evaluation of refugee needs and election monitoring; and the Council of the Wise, comprised of West African elder statesmen and -women who can be dispatched on dispute mediation and resolution missions. ECOWAS claims to have successfully used these organs to help create desirable outcomes, such as the sending of monitors for Togo's 2007 elections which were subsequently judged largely free and fair, and the dispatching of a mediation team to Liberia to help peacefully resolve the 2005 election

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dispute between Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf and George Weah.

SHORTFALLS AND NEEDS

14. (C) On paper, ECOWAS appears far advanced in its ability to manage conflict, however, serious problems and challenges still remain, some of them barely addressed since ECOMOG days:

-- Funding issues still remain unresolved. Donor nations (primarily the U.S., UK, and France) pay for all aspects of the ESF's staff, training, and operational costs. Foreign assistance risks being uncoordinated and redundant, as traditional partners are joined by new, deep-pocketed ones such as the European Union, who do not always act in concert with established donors. Also, a few member states tend to bear nearly all the mission costs, leading to disproportionate influence over tactics, strategy, and political developments.

-- While all member nations have pledged pre-identified units to the TF, and General Lai reports having visited nearly all of those units in their home bases, there is concern that these units will be either not mission-ready or not the units actually deployed in a crisis. Nigeria's armed forces, for example, are already stretched to capacity with domestic and international obligations, and under current conditions it is hard to conceive a scenario in which they could produce their multiple pledged units within the prescribed 30-day timeframe. Moreover, no firm mechanism is in place to ensure that the Main Brigade can field all 5000 troops if necessary; there are no specific nation-by-nation numerical requirements to fill out such a large quota within 90 days.

-- While ECOWAS has made much progress toward forging well-reasoned, broadly supported PSO policies, history has shown that internal politics, historical ties, personal loyalties to specific warlords, and language have all been factors mitigating members' reactions to the call of duty.

-- Little progress has been made toward assembling the

civilian components necessary to meet the needs of ECOWAS' PSO doctrine. West Africa lacks the expertise to engage in peace building activities effectively, and ECOWAS for the short- to medium-term will need to rely on UN support for these functions.

-- ECOWAS' approach to crisis prevention and management remains narrow and haphazard. To date the Commission has made laudable progress toward intervening in and ending armed conflict, but it has done little to guard against, prepare for, or counter equally destabilizing events and situations such as natural disasters, pervasive narcotrafficking, or pandemic disease. It has also shown itself to be distressingly selective when it comes to enforcing Commission Protocols and addressing specific member states' transgressions. Despite a "zero tolerance" policy toward national leaders who gain office through undemocratic means, and despite the potential for regional destabilization caused by unrest in West Africa's largest country, not a word was said about Nigeria's seriously flawed 2007 presidential election. Nor has ECOWAS expressed any interest in resolving Nigeria's intractable Niger Delta conflict, which has economic, military, human rights, environmental, and minority rights aspects -- all topics of alleged vital interest to ECOWAS.

-- Lastly, the ESF has made little progress toward developing its own realistic logistical capabilities. In theory, TF logistical support is supposed to come from Mali, Nigeria, Ghana, and Senegal, along with helicopter support from as-yet-undetermined countries. Nigeria's ability to lend such support relies on C-130s, most of which cannot fly and transport ships badly in need of a refit. Considering that Mali's military is focused on its own internal low-level

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rebellion in the remote north, and is absorbed in meeting its own logistical requirements, the most likely scenario is that donor nations will be called upon to meet the need. The ESF's planning capabilities are further compromised by its inexplicable failure to staff General Lai's team fully -- after two years of full funding by ECOWAS' partners, he has only five of eleven positions filled. Inquiries into the reasons are met with temporization and promises of future action. The result is what is described in reftel -- an unrealistic request that fails to draw upon facilities the donors have already put at ECOWAS' disposal, such as the Murraytown, Sierra Leone Logistics Depot, which already contains \$60 million in USG-supplied ready-to-use equipment.

MOVING FORWARD

15. (C) That an economic community could achieve so much in the arena of conflict resolution and prevention is remarkable. ECOWAS has eclipsed regional organizations better resourced and with fewer development challenges, showing itself to be forward looking and pro-active in addressing the subregion's history of violence and instability. Further progress depends on several factors: strong, focused leadership, both at the Commission and national levels; greater buy-in and ownership on the part of a number of members; the willingness to reform a bloated, inefficient bureaucracy; and continued donor support. For the U.S. the way forward in helping stand up the ESF specifically, and advancing conflict prevention in general, is to demand value for dollar and to decline supporting events such as the inefficient Logistics Exercise (Logex) described in reftel. The USG's refusal to support the Logex as presented sent a strong message about accountability to partner nations, and the lack of ESF ownership of and effort in the planning process. Perhaps hearing "no" more often from its partner nations, and being held to a higher standard of oversight and transparency, will force ECOWAS to resolve some of its long-term weaknesses. The USG could also expand

its influence by offering technical support for the civilian side of the PKO/PSO strategy, currently still in its infancy, perhaps in the areas of rebuilding civilian police capability or a functioning judiciary.

SANDERS